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ABSTRACT

At the University of Southern California's Norris Medical Library, seminars on World Wide Web topics are given to faculty, staff, students, and to community health care providers at remote sites. The presentations have been given using presentation software such as Microsoft PowerPoint, while running Netscape in the background, switching between the two programs as needed. However, this setup requires a large amount of computer memory and, since both programs are graphically intensive, simultaneous use often alters the coloration of the slides or Web pages. This paper explains how to develop Web-based slides using HTML templates. The resulting product makes Web presentations more seamless, is platform independent, and completely portable. In addition, the use of HTML templates makes building a Web based presentation simple and fast. The paper provides a sample HTML template, and describes: using graphical elements; using the color cube to ensure the correct colors will be displayed in the final product; style considerations for Web-based presentations; drawbacks to using Web-based slide presentations; and future enhancements to improve Web presentations. As improvements are made to the traditional presentation software packages and to Web site management tools, the need to creates slides from scratch will be obsolete. (SWC)

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Web-Based Slide Presentations

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Abstract

As the World Wide Web receives more exposure in the popular press and more people have access to the Web, the demand for presentations on the use of the Web, new Web technologies, and specialized Web resources has increased. At the University of Southern California's Norris Medical Library, seminars on Web topics are given to faculty, staff, and students, and to community health care providers at remote sites.

In the past, library computer presentations have been given using presentation software such as Microsoft Powerpoint while running Netscape in the background, switching between the two programs as the need arose. The biggest disadvantage to this setup is the large amount of computer memory required. Both programs are graphically intensive and simultaneous use will often alter the coloration of the slides or Web page.

The development of Web-based slides has made Web presentations more seamless. Only one program is required. Hypertext links can be incorporated directly into the presentation. Unlike Powerpoint presentations, the resulting product is platform independent and completely portable. The use of HTML templates makes building a Web based presentation simple and fast. This presentation will walk librarians through the process of building a Web presentation from setting up the HTML template to a demonstration of the final product.

Introduction

The Norris Medical Library assumes an active role in information technology on the Health Sciences Campus of the University of Southern California. Norris librarians provide users with information about or instruction on new technology, both in the library's hands-on computer classroom and outside of the library setting. Whether providing formal instruction in a computer classroom or giving a presentation in a more

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traditional setting, presentation software packages such as Microsoft PowerPoint or Adobe Persuasion, are a valuable tool for the librarian. However, as full-featured as presentation software packages are, they are not the only choice librarians have for making effective presentations. Hypertext Mark-up Language (HTML) and a Web browser can also be used to create and display Web-based slide presentations. Web-based slides are most appropriate for presentations about Web subjects, but may used for any presentation topic.

Presentation Software

Presentation software programs are robust packages allowing the user to accomplish many tasks. Primarily, presentation software allows the user to create slides for display on a computer screen, an overhead projector, or an actual photographic slide. These slide presentations provide the audience with an outline of the topic as well as a visual aid. Because the software creates slide shows using a template, the slides have a consistent style including graphics, fonts and formatting that contributes to a cohesive presentation. In addition, most presentation packages are able to produce handouts with thumbnail versions of the slides and instructor's notes sheets.

Using presentation software is a fairly easy task. PowerPoint, the most common PC presentation software package, provides numerous templates to allow the user to select an appropriate color and style layout. Dialog or pop-up boxes will walk the user through the process of creating the individual slides and allow the user to insert graphical elements such as charts or graphs. Presentations can be saved to disk and are therefore highly portable. Giving a PowerPoint presentation does not require the computer to have PowerPoint installed. The only required software is the PowerPoint viewer, which is free and fits on one disk.

Web Presentations

Many of the presentations and classes given by Norris librarians are about the World Wide Web. Using PowerPoint for Web presentations can be cumbersome. At least two programs (PowerPoint and Netscape) must be running simultaneously. If the demonstration requires the launching of helper applications such as Adobe Acrobat reader, Real Audio, or QuickTime, the simultaneous processing can become difficult for the computer to manage. PowerPoint and Netscape are both resource intensive programs that operate best when they operate alone. Switching between programs on the PC is fairly easy with the alt+tab key combination. The Macintosh requires additional software to switch easily from one program to the next. Although switching between programs on the PC is easy, it is not necessarily a smooth transition. Continuous switching may affect the performance of the software which often manifests as reduced graphics quality in Netscape. Multicolored pages display poorly when the available memory is low. Reloading the page reduces the quality and the only solution is to close the program and re-launch.

Figure 1. A color intensive site

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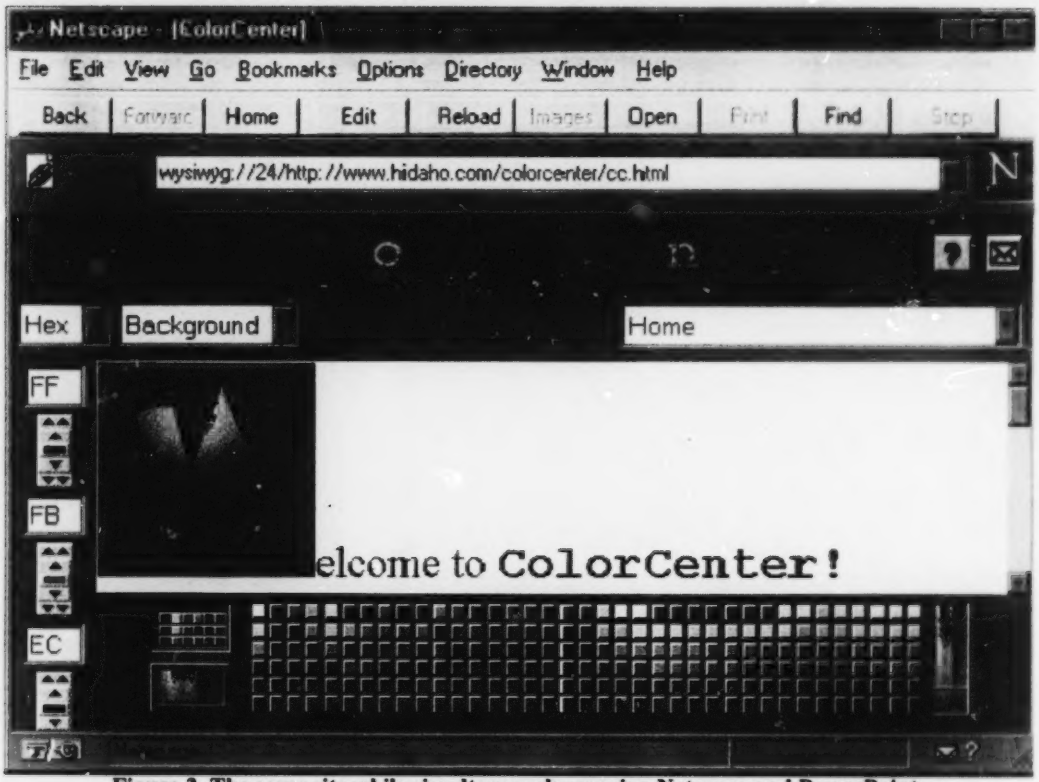

Figure 2. The same site while simultaneously running Netscape and PowerPoint

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Figure 3. Reloading magnifies the problem

Web Browser as Presentation Software

Using a Web browser as presentation software for presentations about the Web will eliminate the multitasking problem. Presentations about Web navigation, Web authoring, Web technology, or Web resources will all benefit from using the browser as presentation software. HTML based "slides" will display directly in the browser. PowerPoint is not needed. Web slides can incorporate links into the presentation and sites can be visited without leaving the browser software. Slides can be saved onto a disk or loaded onto a Web server making the presentation highly portable. Not only is the presentation easy to transport, it is also platform independent. The presenter can develop the HTML slide on a PC, load the slides onto a server, then access the presentat ion with a network-connected PC, Macintosh or UNIX box. The presentation computer needs a Web browser, but in most circumstances, any Web browser will suffice. If coded correctly, Web slides will display in any browser and any version of a particular browser. More complex Web slides can be built if the presenter knows what browser and version will be available.

Slide Templates

Building Web slides is a fairly easy process. All that is needed is knowledge of HTML. Using an HTML authoring tool that allows customized templates (such as HotDog Professional edition) allows the user to select a style and create a format that can be

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utilized for subsequent slides. Elements to be contained in the template include common navigation bar, link colors, bulleted items, and background color or image.

```
<HTML>
<HEAD>
<TITLE>Web-Based Presentations Slide </TITLE>
</HEAD>

<BODY BGCOLOR=#ffffcc LINK=#0000ff VLINK=#0000ff ALINK=#ffff99>

<CENTER>
<A HREF="slide.htm"><IMG SRC="back.gif" BORDER=0></A>
<FONT SIZE=+1><A HREF="index.htm">Web-Based Presentations</A></FONT>
<A HREF="slide.htm"><IMG SRC="next.gif" BORDER=0></A>
</CENTER>

<FONT SIZE=+3>

<B> Slide Header </B><BR>

<IMG SRC="next.gif" BORDER=0> First point<BR>
<IMG SRC="next.gif" BORDER=0> Second point<BR>
<IMG SRC="next.gif" BORDER=0> Third point<BR>

</FONT>
</BODY>
</HTML>
```

Figure 4. Slide template

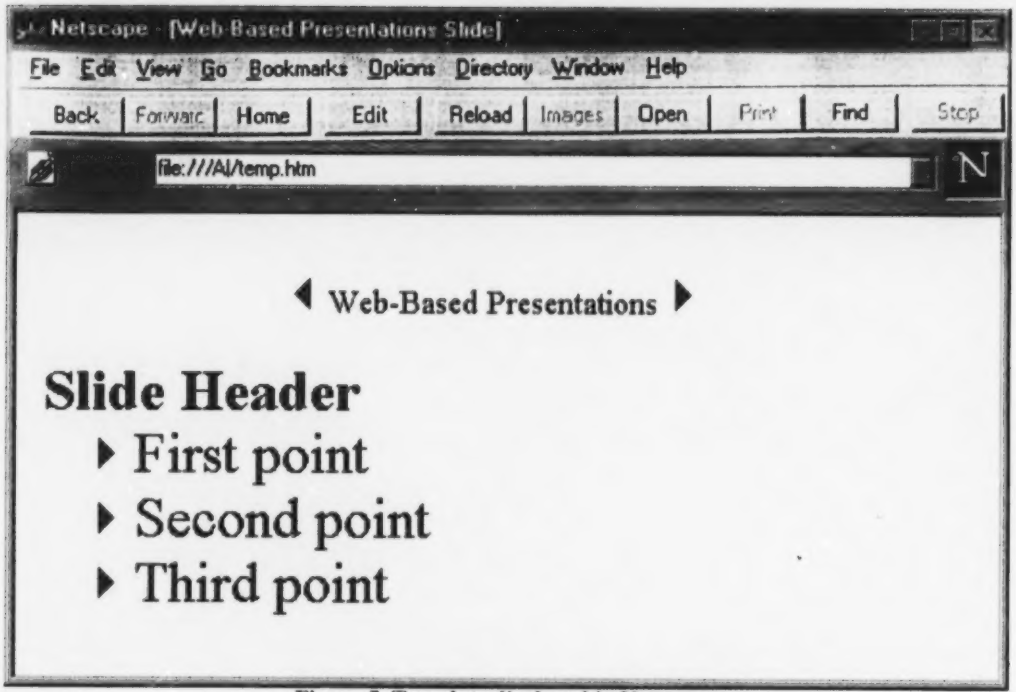

Figure 5. Template displayed in Netscape

Navigation bars or elements should include an option for the next slide, an option for the previous slide, and one to go to the first slide in the presentation. Link colors may be specified in the <body> tag and can include link color, visited link color (changes after a link has been followed), and activated link color (changes while the mouse is selecting the link). The text color may also be specified in the <body> tag. Bulleted items may be the standard Web list bullets, usually a black circle, or may be graphical elements. Background images should be simple, not busy or intrusive. Good background images include images that provide a left-hand margin to the page.

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Netscape - [type_Document_Title_here]
File Edit View Go Bookmarks Options Directory Window Help
Back Forward Home Edit Reload Images Open Print Find Stop
Location: file:///F|/TEMP/Ucsb.htm
Document Done

Figure 6. Standard left-hand border background image

Text can be indented using the <blockquote> </blockquote> tags, or with tables with invisible borders. This indention prevents text from wrapping into the left margin graphic. It may be easier during development to turn on table borders to s et alignment. After the proper width is determined, turn the borders to zero.

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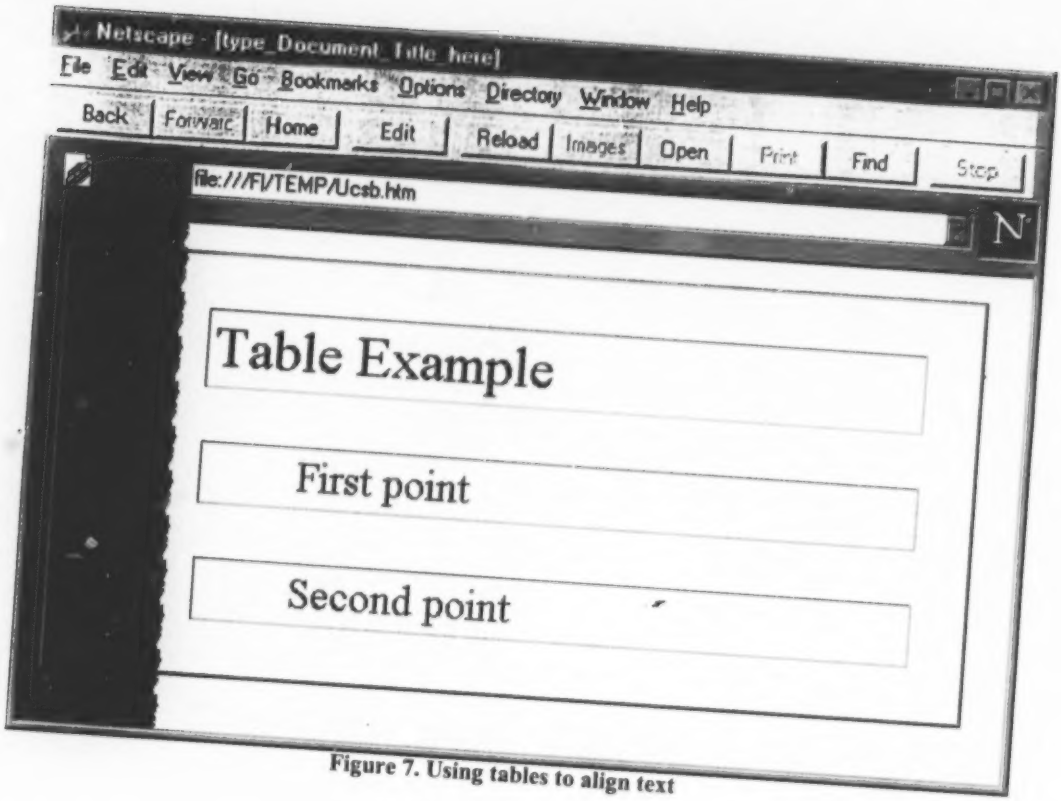
Netscape - [type_Document_Title_here]
File Edit View Go Bookmarks Options Directory Window Help
Back Forward Home Edit Reload Images Open Print Find Stop
file:///F|/TEMP/Ucsb.htm
Table Example
First point
Second point

Figure 7. Using tables to align text

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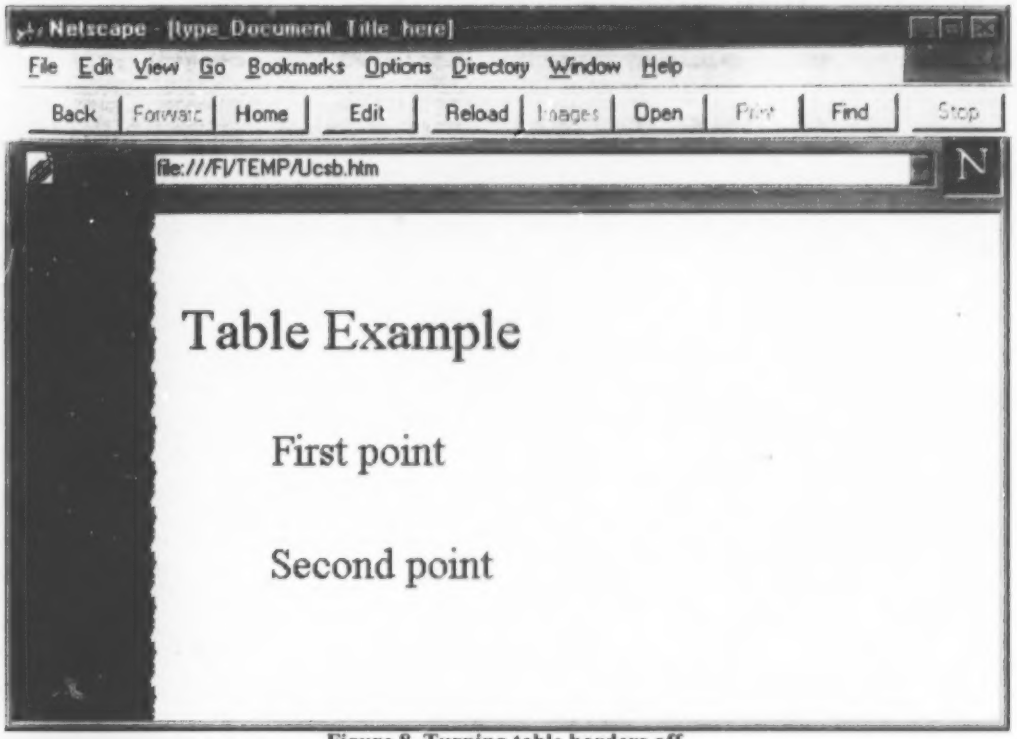
Netscape - [type_Document_Title_here]
File Edit View Go Bookmarks Options Directory Window Help
Back Forward Home Edit Reload Images Open Print Find Stop
file:///F|/TEMP/Ucsb.htm
Table Example
First point
Second point

Figure 8. Turning table borders off

Graphical Elements

The quality and complexity of the Web slide is limited only by the users' imagination. Artistically challenged individuals are able to create basic, attractive Web slides with little graphics creation ability. When surfing the Web, users should pay attention to graphics used on other sites. Background images, colors, bullets, buttons, rules, and links can all be recycled on the Web. Permission should be obtained from the Web page owner to use graphics found on other sites. Most graphics programs make color substitution easy, so if the size, design, or shape of a graphic is appealing, but the color is not, it can be easily manipulated.

Color Cube

Web browsers share the number of colors they are able to display. Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer for the PC and Macintosh platforms are able to display 216 common colors as long as the computer is set to display at least 256 colors. This set of 216 colors is called the color cube and should be used when designing Web graphics.

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Figure 9. 216 common colors for Web graphics

The color cube can be downloaded from the Web and imported into a graphics program such as Paint Shop Pro or PhotoShop as a palette. If a color outside of the cube is used, when the graphic is displayed in the browser, non-palette colors will be replaced by the closest color in the palette. A useful tool in designing Web pages with the correct colors is the Java Color Cube available on the Web at http://sparc.clearink.com/lab/color/. The Java tool displays each of the 216 colors and when the mouse is held over one of the colors, the background displays in the selected color and the hexidecimal code for that color is given. Hex codes are required in the body tag to define the link, text, and background colors.

Style

Style considerations are the same for Web slides as they are for PowerPoint slides. The difference is that PowerPoint has the style built in; Web slides force the user to think about them. When building a Web slide template, users should keep several elements in mind. Use a small number of complimentary colors. Too many colors, a busy background, or too many graphical elements will draw the audience members' eyes away from the important part of the slide: the text. Text should be in a visible size font. Font and font size cannot be specified in HTML. The template should include the <font size=+n> tag to increase the size of displayed font. When presenting, the speaker can adjust the font on the browser, but has no control over the remote user's setup. Limit the number of bulleted points made on each slide. The amount of text that can be displayed is limited by the size of the screen. Do not make a slide longer than a page; remote users may not scroll.

When designing or giving a Web-based slide presentation, there are a few ways to improve the way the slides appear on the screen. Each of the following suggestions will improve the presentation:

- Image borders should be turned off. The image tag may contain an attribute called border; this attribute should equal zero.
- Underlined links should be turned off in the browser preferences.
- Display area should be maximized. The best way to do this will depend on the browser. In Netscape, the directory buttons should be hidden and the navigation buttons should be switched to text only (under general preferences). The status bar at the bottom of the screen can be removed with the control+alt+s toggle command.
- If desired, the link color may be made the same as the text color. Links will be transparent to the user, but the presenter will know where the hot links have been coded. The presenter may believe that single color text flows better.

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Drawbacks

Web-based slide presentations are not difficult to create, but there are some drawbacks that would not be encountered with presentation software packages. First, the initial development time of Web slides is longer than it would be when using a traditional software package. Finding or creating graphics, defining the text layout, and building a template all need to take place before the slide creation process can begin. However, once the user has developed a template or two to use, future slide building takes much less time. Secondly, browsers cannot produce handouts or instructor's notes. However, the presenter can copy and paste the text from the Web page to a Word document table to produce high quality slide-like handouts, without much additional time or effort. Lastly, once the slide have been complete and placed on the Web, remote users with the URL can access the presentation at a later date. The problem with remote users is the inability to control the browser settings on the remote user's machine. Font, font size, screen size, browser, screen resolution, and computer platform will vary from user to user. The presentation may not appear the same on the remote user's screen as it was originally intended. However, unless converted to a Web -viewable format, presentations given using PowerPoint or Persuasion will not be available to remote users at all.

Future Enhancements

New tools will make Web-based slides easier to design and create. Site management software such as Microsoft FrontPage and NetObjects Fusion allow the user to create Web sites using pre-formatted or user-defined templates that incorporate graphics suites that come with the site software. Style sheets in these programs will reduce the amount of creativity required by the user to produce an attractive final product. Drag-and-drop functionality will allow the user to better define the layout of the graphics and text. The incorporation of browser plug-ins will also increase the seamlessness of Web-based presentations. Instead of launching a helper application, the browser will be able to display disparate media inline. For example, sound can play in the background as the presentation progresses, Acrobat files will display in the browser window instead of launching the separate viewer application. Multimedia will enhance the contents of the Web page. Java can make the textual elements of the page move; Shockwave and ActiveX can add interactivity. Offline Web browsing software such as WebWhacker and FreeLoader allow the presenter to "surf" the Web during a presentation without a live Internet connection.

Traditional presentation software packages have also made enhancements to make them more Web friendly. Both PowerPoint and Persuasion have the capability to create slide presentations that are viewable on the Web. Microsoft has a free program called Internet Assistant for PowerPoint that convert PowerPoint 95 slides to Web pages. Each slide is made into an image and navigation buttons are added to the Web page below the slide image. Text versions of each slide are also made. This will make presentations available on the Web, but with some drawbacks. Each converted slide creates three files, one of which is a large image file. If server space is a consideration, the files could cause a problem. Also, persons visiting the presentation from a modem connected computer will have the additional burden of downloading the large images. In addition, the converted slides do not contain hypertext links, so presentations about the Web cannot include links to sites. Persuasion allows the user to include link s in the presentation and add URLs to a

slide during development using a drag-and-drop feature. Being an Adobe program, the converted Persuasion presentations are in Acrobat format. The Acrobat reader or plug-in is required in addition to the Web browse r to display converted Persuasion presentations.

Conclusion

As improvements are made to the traditional presentation software packages and to Web site management tools, the need to create slides from scratch will be obsolete. Each of the different types of tools is moving toward the other in functionality. Ideally they will meet in the middle with future versions of PowerPoint containing an option for Web templates in addition to current traditional templates, and FrontPage containing templates for presentations not just singular pages or sites.

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